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**Subject:** Today's hearing on fracking research

**FYI**

## **HYDRAULIC FRACTURING:**

# **GOP blasts White House request to boost fracking study funds**

Nick Juliano, E&E reporter

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House Republicans today criticized an Obama administration request for additional money to fund an ongoing study into the health, safety and environmental consequences of hydraulic fracturing.

Lawmakers argued that the interagency probe was a precursor to aggressive federal regulation of oil and gas drilling and charged that the agencies were not sharing enough information about their activities.

Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.) questioned the request for tens of millions in additional funding for the study next year, pointing to the "terrible track record" of U.S. EPA related to its withdrawn conclusion tying groundwater contamination in Pavillion, Wyo., to fracking. She also complained that EPA, the Department of Energy, the U.S. Geological Survey and other agencies failed to release a draft of the interagency study by last fall or finalize it by the beginning of this year, as initially scheduled.

"Congress and the public have very few details regarding the administration's ongoing activities in this area," Lummis said at a hearing this morning. She said lawmakers wanted to ensure that "the administration's research activities are appropriate, balanced and transparent."

Lummis chairs the House Science, Space and Technology Subcommittee on Energy, which convened today's joint hearing along with the Environment Subcommittee. Officials from EPA, USGS, DOE and the Department of Health and Human Services testified.

Rep. Chris Stewart (R-Utah), who chairs the Environment Subcommittee, accused the administration of taking a "cart before the horse" approach to the study in looking for an excuse to regulate hydraulic fracturing. Instead, he urged the administration to embrace the benefits natural gas has delivered, pointing to a 12 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions between 2005 and 2011.

"Rather than search for problems that do not exist, the EPA and this administration should recognize that fracking is the solution, not a problem," Stewart said.

The administration witnesses all agreed that new domestic supplies of oil and natural gas unlocked with recent advances combining hydraulic fracturing, which is also referred to as fracking, and horizontal drilling have been a boon for the economy and aided efforts to address climate change. But they stressed that much remains unknown about the controversial production technique, which has been used in Eastern states like Pennsylvania only for a few years. They said the study was aimed at establishing best practices to ensure hydraulic fracturing could continue with support from the public.

"This is a period of great opportunity for the prudent development of our country's oil and gas resources, which could make a positive contribution to our economy, jobs and balance of trade. But to get these benefits, we must do this right," said Guido DeHoratiis, DOE's acting deputy assistant secretary for oil and gas.

The administration's fiscal 2014 budget requests a total of \$44.7 million for the fracturing research, including \$12 million for DOE, DeHoratiis said. EPA is seeking \$14.1 million for its unconventional oil and gas research, said Kevin Teichman, a senior science adviser in the Office of Research and Development. And USGS is seeking \$18.6 million, said David Russ, USGS's Northeast regional director.

In the current fiscal year, EPA is spending about \$6.1 million, DOE is spending about \$10 million and USGS is spending about \$8.6 million, the witnesses said.

Agencies are focusing on their own areas of expertise within the study, witnesses said. For example, USGS is studying the link between fracturing and earthquakes, while EPA is studying potential water contamination and methane emissions generated by the technique.

Republicans on the committee also slammed EPA's refusal to send the agency's lead representative to the hydraulic fracturing study, senior policy counsel Bob Sussman, despite receiving four weeks' notice of the hearing.

"While I hope the agency had a good reason for their refusal to make Mr. Sussman available, they did not share this reason with us," Stewart said, noting that Sussman's absence emphasizes Republicans' existing concerns about EPA's lack of transparency.

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